

NGO statement on the oral update on the Executive Committee Conclusion

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs.

A new emphasis on durable solutions is needed. Voluntary repatriation is too rare, local integration too elusive, and third country solutions too few.

Refugees face obstacles to return. Refugee children, women, those with disabilities, and others experience additional challenges.

- NGOs stress that this durable solution must be linked to the principle of voluntariness. The ExCom Conclusion should revise the affirmation that voluntary repatriation is ‘the preferred durable solution’ – it may not reflect aspirations and undercuts political will for other solutions.

We hope the Conclusion will build on the 2022 Evaluation of Repatriation.

- NGOs look forward to discussing progress around the Evaluation’s recommendations, especially the update of related UNHCR policies and operational guidance.

On local integration, this solution is limited by a lack of national political will, low international funding, difficult to measure, and lack of guidance.

- NGOs call on the ExCom Conclusion to tackle these challenges, allowing for its increased relevance.

Refugee access to legal support remains a concern, with many facing barriers. Refugees, including children, are left vulnerable to exploitation and denial of basic legal protections.

On third country solutions, the following guidance in the Conclusion could make them more impactful:

- **On resettlement**, States should adopt multiyear planning and funding, with flexible, unallocated quotas; use innovative processing modalities; and ensure programs align with UNHCR’s priorities without restrictive criteria.
- **On family reunification**, States should implement policy changes, administrative and procedural flexibilities to ensure access to family reunification, especially for unaccompanied and separated children.
- **On skills-based pathways**, States should lift barriers in access to education visas and labor mobility; ensure skills-based pathways offer protection from *refoulement* with a path to permanent status; and provide integration supports.

NGOs urge States to adopt community sponsorship programs, which can be associated with all pathways and have many positive benefits.

Guidance on the role of third country solutions in responding to climate change and natural disasters would also be useful.

We have seen innovations in response to Afghanistan and Ukraine. These good practices should be mainstreamed, ensuring that durable solutions programs are truly durable. States must not use temporary pathways as a rationale for imposing restrictions that limit people's ability to seek protection.

We would like to emphasize three cross-cutting issues that are critical to the success of solutions:

First, there is a connection between socio-economic inclusion in host communities and opportunities for solutions. Self-reliance programs allow refugees to contribute meaningfully to host communities as well as support refugees pursue opportunities elsewhere. Host communities can participate and benefit from such programs, enhancing social cohesion and community development.

Second, another tool to advance solutions are refugee travel documents, issued by host countries and allowing refugees to travel globally. As a proof of identity, these documents foster socio-economic inclusion within host countries and allow refugees to pursue study and work opportunities globally, without fear of *refoulement*.

Finally, meaningful refugee participation and leadership is a critical cross-cutting foundation to successful solutions.

The Global Compact on Refugees underscores the importance of the participation of refugees in decision-making processes. However, the inability of refugee leaders to freely move across borders hampers their ability to engage in international forums, limiting their contributions to solutions.

Refugee travel documents are one way to address this. Moreover, the international community must ensure the meaningful inclusion of refugee voices in these forums, recognizing their expertise and lived experience to shape policies.

Concrete steps should be taken to address the challenges faced by refugees in exercising their right to free movement. Through their full and meaningful participation in international processes, we uphold principles of inclusion and equity and advance durable solutions and complementary pathways with direct input and guidance from those with lived experience.

We stand ready to support and collaborate with UNHCR and governments to put these recommendations into action.

Further details are available on icvanetwork.org.

Thank you.